***Divine Sovereignty
Romans 9:1-5
RO127-01***

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Romans 9. We move to a new section this morning, verse 14-18, and our subject is Divine Sovereignty.

**Different Human Views of God**

From time immemorial, it has been the custom of mankind to view the God of the Bible as someone who is trying to do the best that He can. I've even, as a matter of fact, heard Christians speaking about God as discovering that a plan that He had is not working, and so, He tries to figure out something different and to readjust the plan that He has. When people talk like that, they indeed reveal that they don't know a great deal about the God of the Bible.

The world used the essence of God, as revealed in the Bible, as simply the accumulation of a lot of myths of well-meaning people, and that they are not to be taken seriously. Therefore, people speak lightly about God. They speak lightly about holiness. They speak lightly about sin. And they speak lightly about hell itself, and they joke about it. As a matter of fact, the arrogance of man is so great that he views himself as a candidate for godhood in large denominations, such as the Mormons, that they may somewhere along the line themselves become gods. So, they reduce the Creator God to nothing but a mortal man who's kind of stumbling around there trying to do the best He can, muddling His way through.

The unregenerate man especially hates the idea of being under the absolute authority of a God to whom he must answer, a God who does not answer to anyone but Himself. So, men really like to pretend that God is really not out there and that we people here on earth live our lives in our own rules. It's a self-delusion. The more spiritually-blinded man has become, the greater is his inclination to claim to being autonomous. Nobody above him. The creature supreme. No obligation to God or scripture.

God's claim to sovereignty, as a matter of fact, when it is declared, and the Bible does declare it, is met with a lot of indignant screaming and yelling and accusing God of being unjust in imposing His will on man. The natural, unsaved man does not take kindly to the idea that there is nothing that he can offer God which would gain salvation for him. That is the ultimate humiliation, and people really do hate that idea. Fallen man bases his hopes of heaven on his personal determination and on his efforts. He is determined to go to heaven, and he's going to do the best he can to get there. The biblical principle of divine election unto salvation, therefore, is totally rejected, and the human will is elevated to a sovereign position on the matter.

The Lord Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation is viewed by the average person in our society as a very bigoted viewpoint. The Apostle Paul, we have seen in the ninth chapter of Romans, deeply regrets that his fellow Jews have doomed themselves to hell by rejecting this person Jesus Christ as their Savior. He has pointed out that while God promised to provide salvation to Abraham and his posterity, God did not promise to save every Jew. Only those Jews go to heaven who are born again spiritually by trusting in Jesus Christ for their salvation. They are the true Israelites - and only those who will trust in Christ for salvation whom God chooses to come into that special line.

**God's Sovereignty and Justice**

The fact of God's sovereign election was illustrated here by Paul in God's choice of Isaac over Ishmael (when Ishmael was the older one), of Jacob over Esau (when Esau was the older one). He chose the younger as the channel of divine blessing, clearly demonstrating that it's God who decides who's in and who's out. The bypassing of the elder sons who held the right of being the channels of blessings is labeled as being injustice on the part of God.

So, Paul takes up the issue of the sovereignty of God and of His justice in dealing with mankind. You and I must have our hearts at ease about the subject. It is not unusual for the thought to occur to us that sometimes when we read about how God does things, it doesn't seem fair. And it is certainly in the minds of the unbeliever a very easy conclusion that God is not fair. People are always shouting that something happens to them in life, and they say, "Oh, well, this just isn't fair, and God is treating me in a way that is not just."

So, beginning at verse 14, Paul says, "Ok, let's talk about that." And he says, "What shall we say then?" The word "say" is the word "lego." It looks like this in the Greek Bible: "lego." It refers to a summary statement. It's in the future tense, which Paul indicates as any time we can discuss this question. It's active voice, a personal opinion that we will hold at any time in the future.

"What shall we say then?" And the word "then" is this Greek "oun," which in the Greek language indicates that an inference is to be drawn from the context (this which has been dealing with Isaac and Jacob). So, "What," we would say here in translating this is simply, "What shall we conclude then? From all that we have seen about God making His choices, as for His own will and His own good pleasure, what are we going to say about that?"

And then, as you may remember in the Greek language, to make something very emphatic, they don't put a verb in there. They just skip it. And that's why you notice in your translation you have some words in italics. "Is there unrighteousness." The word "unrighteousness," is the word, "adikia." The word "adikia" means, "injustice, lack of fairness." What he is saying is, "Is there injustice on the part of God?"

Now, one of the beauties of the Greek language is that when they ask the question, they could throw in a word that would indicate whether the answer should be, "Yes," or "No." This word "may" is in the Greek sentence here, and it tell us that the answer is, "No." If you wanted "yes," you would have used this other Greek negative, "ou," which would have indicated that the answer is, "Yes." So, we are actually translating this in this way, "There is no injustice, is there?" That's how we would say it in English to indicate that the answer is, "No." There is no injustice with God, is there? Of course not. And, he's talking about God the Father.

To stress that the answer is, "No," Paul then uses a phrase that we have had several times in his writings, and that is translated as, "God forbid." Actually, this is an idiom in the Greek language. It has the negative, "me," for "no," and it has the Greek word "ginomai," which means to become. So that, literally, it says, "not to become," or we would translate it as, "may it never be, not at all," is the idea. And "God forbid" is an idiomatic translation to strongly say, "No, that is not true. God is not unfair under any condition." God was not unjust when He did not choose the eldest sons for the line of the Abrahamic blessing.

God in His divine essence, we know, is perfect justice. The Bible tells us that. Therefore, whatever else we know, we know that He cannot be unfair. And man is not in the position to pass judgment on God's conduct and God's decisions relative to justice. That is the enormous arrogance that characterizes human beings: that they think that they are in a position to pass judgment on what God does.

The Bible says the God who made us all is a totally fair God. He is never unjust, and whatever we may think is unjust, we don't have the picture straight. He acts with absolute freedom of choice. He is limited only by one thing, and that is His own holiness.

So, the Apostle Paul makes a definite statement in verse 14. In view of what we have said, can it be said that God is unfair in doing this? Absolutely not. Perish the thought. Verse 15, he goes to illustrate this. He says, "For." This is the Greek conjunction "gar." He's going to introduce a proof text from the Old Testament. "For he [God] saith to Moses." Moses, the leader of the Jews from the Egyptian slavery.

**Mercy and Compassion in the Story of**

And it is referring here to a statement that is recorded for us in Exodus 33:19, "And He said [that is, God said], 'I will make all my goodness pass before thee [speaking to Moses], and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.'"

Now, the Apostle Paul says, "I'll illustrate my point about God's sovereignty in another way. I'm referring back to an Old Testament statement recorded for us in Exodus that God made to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy.'" The word "mercy" is this Greek word "eleeo," and it means, "to exercise pity toward someone who is in need. It connotes a sympathy for somebody's misery. It is in the future tense. And God says, "I in the future will have a sympathy for the misery that you will be facing. This will be my personal, active attitude. And I will have that sympathy for misery on whom I choose to have it." That's what He means when He says, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy. I'll have that mercy on whomever I choose to place that mercy."

And again, the word is used a second time, the same word, when it says, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy." The second time, it is in the subjective mood, which indicates a potential condition. Furthermore, it uses a word that indicates that this is a third-class condition. "Maybe I will have mercy, maybe I won't." So, God says, "I'll have mercy on whom I have mercy."

And furthermore, He says, "I'll have compassion." "Oikteiro." "I will have compassion," which means, "I have a desire to relieve misery." Mercy has to do with sympathy for somebody in their misery. Compassion has to do with action to do something about relieving that misery. "Anytime in the future," he says, "that I will choose to do so, I'll move in there, and I'll help somebody because I chose to do it."

Now, notice what the implications are of what we're building up here. Someplace along the line, you're going to ask why He does it. Is it because we deserve it? It there something within us that calls this out? Or is this entirely a sovereign God's decision? Oh, the implication is clearly that it is God standing on His own, independent of anything within ourselves. So, He says, "I'll have compassion. This is my constant attitude. I'll reach out and I'll help those that I decide to help."

Now, the context of this quotation in Exodus 33:19 is in itself of interest to get the full impact of what the Apostle Paul is saying. The background of the quotation is this. The Jews have just broken God's moral laws in a horrendous way while Moses was up on Mount Sinai receiving the law from God. Exodus 32, the first 8 verses describe the terrible, degenerate act that they were guilty of. God, in His anger, is ready to destroy the whole nation and to begin a new Abrahamic line with Moses.

And so, in Exodus 32:9-10, God says that to Moses and tells Moses, "I'm going to wipe them all out. I mean, look at them, Moses. They're running around naked. They're having a sex orgy. They've got a golden calf. And Aaron, who's going to be my high priest, is standing there and saying, 'Here is Jehovah, your God!'"

And God is just, in effect, saying, "Moses, these people are slaves. They're never going to among to anything but slaves. They've got the mentality of a slave. They can never rise to the fruits of freedom. They just do not have the capacity to do right, and I'm fed up with them. I'm going to wipe them out."

Well, Moses pleads for the people of God, to spare the nation, because of God's integrity, how this would look to the nations of the world, because the word has spread from Egypt what has happened. The Egyptian Pharaoh, the mightiest ruler of the day, has lost his whole contingent of a million and a half slaves. Pharaoh is humiliated. These people have gone out, and the shockwaves have reverberated through the ancient world, and fear has gripped the hearts of the heathen. And Moses says, "How's it going to look if you wipe this group of people out after the marvelous way you've brought us out of the land?" So, God agrees to Moses' pleading. Exodus 32:11-35 tell us about that.

God then directs Moses to resume the journey to the Promised Land after sending punishment in among the people and executing a number of them. He directs Moses to resume the journey to the Promised Land, but God says, "I'm not going to go with you." Exodus 33:1-6 tell about that. Now, that's a shock to Moses. Moses says, "What do you mean you're not going with us? How are we going to be identified as a separate people from all the people of the world if you're not here with us?" And God says, "My anger is burning so great, I'm ready to destroy all of them. And I'm going to separate myself." So, Moses again pleads that God should not do that. And God was pleased with His faithful Moses, so pleased that He communed with Him as friend-to-friend, Exodus 33:7-11 tell us.

And so, Moses pleads with God that God should go along with the Jews on the journey to the Promised Land to show that they are special people. He makes that plea in Exodus 33:12-17. And so, we come to Exodus 33:18, which we are particularly interested now.

**God Revealing His Glory to Moses**

Moses then acts to have a demonstration of God, His sovereignty, this God to whom Moses is so obedient. Moses says, "I'd like to get just a little better acquainted with you. This has been a shocking experience that you and I have been through. We've talked on Mount Sinai. I've seen the power of your deity. I've been in touch with your holy indignation against this vile, degenerate people that you're trying to make something of, and I'm discouraged."

What preacher does not know discouragement of people who cannot rise to the opportunities of their spiritual heritage of their instruction, who go off into immorality, who go off into self-destructive things, who fall in love with the ugly culture of the world, and they pursue it, and some of them don't even have the brains to know that that's what they're doing. And they smile in their pigsty like the prodigal son who thought he was riding high.

Yes, Moses says, "I need a little encouragement," is what, in effect, he was saying. "I just wish that you and I could look at each other face-to-face, eye-to-eye. I mean, that would make You so real to me, and it would give me the thrust that I need to be able to stand under the flack of the brutality of what I'm going to be taking, and am taking, through this people.

Well, God said to Moses, "No, you can't look Me face-to-face. If you did, you would die. But I'll accommodate you. You want to see my glory? You want to be awed by the fact that you've been in the presence of the Creator God? I'll tell you what we'll do." And so, in Exodus 33:18, we read, "And he [Moses] said, 'I beseech thee, show me thy glory.' And He [God] said, 'I will make all My goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord.'"

Now, you know the word "name" stands for "the essence." God says, "I'm going to come before you, and you are going to see me in all my essence, with one lightning blow into your brain, into the depths of your soul is going to come the awesome realization of my omnipotence, my omnipresence, my love, my eternity, my righteousness, my justice. Everything that characterizes me is summed up in My name. You're going to see it all."

"'And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious.'" Now, what does He mean by that? He says, "And I'm going to demonstrate to you that I am the independent, sovereign God. I don't treat you like you deserve to be treated. I treat you in the grace that you n ever deserve. And there isn't anytime when I'm coming through just because what is in you. I'm coming through for you because of what I am and what this reflects upon me."

"'.I will show mercy on whom I will shew mercy.' And he said, 'Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.' And the Lord said, 'Behold, there is a place by Me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with My hand while I pass by.'" I'm going to put you here in this little cave-like spot, and I'm going to put my hand over it, and I'm going to walk by. And after I walk by, I'm going to take my hand away, and you're going to see just the back of a departing God, and you will see a glory that will forever seal to you that I am real, I am out there, and I am everything that I claim to be." "I will take away Mine hand, and thou shalt see My back: but My face shall not be seen."

So, Moses indeed had the experience of seeing the glory of God, and out of that experience, Moses learned that God is sovereign. How long is it going to be before some of you learn that lesson, that God is sovereign? He is no bumbling fool. He is no stumbling grandfather. He is no inept character who's trying to make it and trying to figure out and trying to keep it all together.

He is the omnipotent, fully competent, and totally fair God, but He is King. Nobody tells Him what to do. Nobody outmaneuvers Him. Nobody tricks Him. Nobody kids him. And it is amazing how human beings keep acting as if He doesn't know what's going on.

Moses cannot view God's face, but He gets the confirmation of the glory of God. He gets the realization of God's treatment as for His sovereignty of those He deals with. God's sovereign grace chose the Jews to be His special people, and He chooses individuals today for salvation. It is not a matter of justice, so nobody can claim salvation; it is a matter of God's goodness.

Paul does not try to argue a point about God's character and conduct, you notice, on the basis of human reason and logic. All he does is take us to scripture and say, "Here is the truth about God. Here is the truth about God."

So, in Romans 9, coming to verse 16, we have the basis of the divine choice stated. The question was, "Is God unfair in what He is doing? Is He not acting in perfect truth? How shall we deal with what we see God doing in making choices on His own?"

Verse 16, "So then." That expression, "so then," indicates a logical conclusion which is about to follow which refers to the justification of God's selection which Paul quoted from Exodus 33:19 in Romans 9:15. "It is not of Him that willeth." The word "will" is the Greek word "thelo." This refers to human volition choosing something. It has the negative. It is not on the basis of somebody who decides, "I am going to be saved."

Furthermore, it is not on the basis of somebody who runs. The Greek word is, "trecho." This refers to personal effort of some kind. A good word would be "hustling." Paul says, "So, it's not on the basis of somebody who is determined to go someplace and to do something. It is not on the basis of somebody who is hustling that God chooses for blessing. Not in response to human exertion. God's call to salvation blessing is not determined by the lost sinner's will or by his efforts towards salvation.

This does not violate the principle of 1 Corinthians 9, I should point out, verse 24, which says, "Know ye not that they who run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain." Paul, here, is speaking about the Christian who has been called to salvation now to run the race of service in such a way that he will obtain.

This does not contradict, furthermore, Hebrews 12:1, which says, "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." The point that these scriptures make, that once God has called you, once as He has indicated the course that He wants you to run, then that's the time to get with it. Then, that's the time to be self-motivating.

It becomes so wearisome to have to constantly try to get Christians motivated to do what they ought to do, just to be consistent. And you would think that they do not understand the eternal consequences that are at stake. What they do with their lives, and to be consistent in the calling that they have from our God. He said, "It's God who shows mercy." And we have that same word again for showing mercy. God who, in sovereignty, decides to bless you. God who, in sovereignty, decides to choose you for salvation. It is God who in mercy has called you to an opportunity.

Anyone who only hopes he is saved and he hopes he is going to heaven indicates that he has sought it on the basis of his will and on the basis of his own efforts. And Paul says, "That is wrong. God acts in a sovereignty that is not based on what you decide to do, nor on the effort that you put out. The human will, nor human efforts, are not the source of salvation. They are not the source of divine blessing."

**God's Power Shown Through the Ten Plagues**

Then, the same thing in verse 17, Paul picks up another Old Testament example. He moves to the Egyptian Pharaoh. He says, "For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh." He introduces this with the word "scripture," that's the Greek word, "graphe." That literally means, "the writing." It's referring here to the Old Testament Bible. And do you notice that Paul equates the Bible to God's Word?

"For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh." And then, he proceeds to quote what God has said that's in Exodus 9:16. He makes this quotation and calls it scripture. You see, the Bible is the official proclamation of God. It is the Word of God. And the Bible is very careful to present itself as such. The scripture says the same thing as God saying something. So, you cannot know anything about what God says, and you cannot express anything as an official declaration unless it's in the Bible. The Bible is what God has said, not all the things that men accumulate and say that He has said.

So, "The scripture saith an official declaration to Pharaoh," this man who was the king of Egypt. God says to Pharaoh, "'Even for this purpose.'" This is an emphatic way of stressing the purpose that God has intensely. "'For this very purpose,'" God says, "I have raised thee up.'" The word "raised" is "exegeiro." This word is sometimes used for the resurrection of the human body. Here, it means, "to elevate to public prominence." Here, God says, "I have been personally responsible for making you the ruler of Egypt."

It's in the aorist tense, which means it's some point in the past. Active voice: God Himself did this in placing Pharaoh in this position. And He did it, He said, "So that." The word is "hopos," which is used here to indicate God's purpose, "in order that I might show something." The word "show" is "endeiknumi." "Endeiknumi" in the Greek Bible means, "to display, or to demonstrate something." God says, "I have raised you up to a position of political power because I want to show something to the world through you. I want to demonstrate something about Myself."

And what is that God's going to demonstrate? He's going to demonstrate his "dunamis," His power. And this refers to the inherent, omnipotence of God. "I am going to use My omnipotence against Pharaoh," who was the most powerful ruler of the world at the time. God says, "I am raising you up so that I can show my power through you." When Pharaoh is told that God wants him to release these saves, Exodus 5:2 gives this response, "And Pharaoh said, 'Who is the Lord [that is, "Who is 'YHWH,' Jehovah?"], that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go.'"

Beautiful. Here is the whole confrontation set up. Here is a king who says, "I am absolutely sovereign. There is nobody who tells me what to do. I'm in charge. And Pharaoh, had he known better, would [have] known that he's in for some real problems. He's arrogant. He refuses to free the Hebrew slaves, and God has the confrontation set up.

So, the Lord says to Moses in Exodus 6:1, "Then the Lord said unto Moses, 'Now shalt thou see what I will do to Pharaoh: for with a strong hand shall he let them go, and with a strong hand shall he drive them out of his land.'" God says, "This man says, 'No' to Me. 'Who is this Jehovah? I don't know him, and I'm not listening to him. Forget it.'" God says, "Now, watch, Moses, and remind the people to watch what kind of a God you're dealing with. I'm going to take this man, and I'm going to twist him, and dangle him, and shake him, and rattle him so bad that he himself is going to drive you out. He's not just going to say, 'Ok, go ahead and leave.'" Now, how could he change this autonomous man? Who can break such a strong, mighty leader? Well, God did, and He did it by displaying His omnipotent power, by bringing the intensity of the plagues.

God says, "Ok, you don't want to let them go? You think you're in charge, huh? What's important in Egypt? Water. Ok, your water is now turned to blood." You're kidding. And sure enough, every fresh water stream was blood. And blood stinks after a while. Every place is blood. You can't drink the Nile. You can't drink any of the springs. Everything is blood. Pharaoh says, "I made a mistake, and he backs off." God says, "Ok, you've got your water back." And all the Egyptians rushed down to drink. No, no problem over in Goshen land. There, the water is pure as ever. In fact, the Jews probably started bottling it and selling it over on the other side [laughter] when they saw such a good business opportunity! I don't know, but probably! But anyhow, things are great on that side, but they're terrible over here.

He says, "Ok, you've got your water back." Pharaoh said, "I've changed my mind." God says, "Well how would you like some frogs?" Some of you people love those slimy, little creatures. Frogs. One time, when I visited Florida, I went out one night frog digging. You know, you have a stick, a long stick with three sharp points like Neptune's thing, and you shine a light, and this frog looks up and says, "Hi!" Pop! You grab another frog leg. "Put him in there!" Here's another one. Pop! Wonderful, digging frogs. Get those frog legs. But boy, when they're everyplace. You get into bed, and the slimy things are there. You're walking around the house, and you're kicking them out of the way. I mean, it became an enormous misery.

Now, who on earth could make frogs multiply that fast? I mean, it takes time. I remember when we were building this building, the land was low here. We had to fill all this back up to, to a proper drainage, and we got hit with some terrific rain, so there was a huge pond out here. Well, my boys were little. They put some rubber innertubes, and they floated around in this pond. It was great fun. But in a few days, I notice there were literally thousands and thousands of polliwogs floating all through this thing. And in a few days, they started popping out as frogs. We were under a plague. So, we got a pump and pumped the water out. But it took time, even for that. But God says, "Here you are. You got frogs." Now, he backs off and says, "I can't take it. Get rid of the frogs." Again, he changes his mind.

So, God says, "Let's step it up. Let's pull the notch up one more. We'll give you some gnats." Everywhere, gnats. Have you ever been out at a picnic, and every time you take a breath, the gnats come up your little nose and find little place they can nuzzle up there, and you're striking the gnats, and then they're buzzing in your ears? Well, this was gnats that was just everywhere. They were in their eyes. They were in their mouth. You couldn't even talk to somebody without getting gnats all over your tongue. It was just misery. Pharaoh backs off. God gets rid of the gnats. [Pharaoh] changes his mind.

God says, "Well, let's tighten the noose down one more notch. How about flies? We'll give you flies swarming everywhere! Everywhere, there flies. And I don't mean these little bitty flies. I mean Texas-sized, giant flies that buzz and bite and swarm, and they're all over everywhere. You sit down to eat, and the first thing you do is wave your hand over the meal to get the flies off, because they covered everything. And finally, Pharaoh says, "Get rid of the flies." Can't stand it. And then, he changes his mind.

Then God says, "Let's get a little tougher. Now, we'll start hitting your food supply. We've been giving you misery, and that hasn't worked. Now I'm going to hit your livestock." And the livestock was stricken with a deadly disease. And the animals were dropping all over the Egyptian countryside. Not over in Goshen land; everything was great there. But they were dying left and right, and the stench was rising, and finally, Pharaoh says, "Stop it! We'll all die if that continues." And so, God stopped, removed the disease. And Pharaoh changed his mind again.

And so, Moses goes back to God again and says, "He won't let us go." So God says, "Ok, I've got something new for them. I'm going to give them boils." And, it's really funny when you read the scriptures, because up to now, the magicians are trying, carrying on their enchantments with all this, and it says at this point, they couldn't do their stuff. They were so covered with boils, they couldn't stand. They couldn't sit. They couldn't move. And, if you've ever had a boil that is really festering, it hurts. And to have boils all over everything, the pain was enormous. And it wasn't only on the human beings; it was on the animals, too. So that, you have all this bellowing and screaming and crying out of the animals as well as the human beings.

Well, God removes that, and Pharaoh backs off again. So, God says, "Let's finish off the food supply. See how he likes that." And God sends in a giant hailstorm. And, it is knocking men and animals to shreds. So, Pharaoh calls for a halt to that. There's not much left now. The animals have been killed. The food supply has been contaminated. It's been shredded by the hailstorm. Now, God says, "We'll do it another way. We'll finish off the vegetation." And he sends locusts in. The eighth plague was a swarm of locusts. And they swooped in and ate just about everything else that was left. And again, Pharaoh refused. Hardened his heart.

So, the ninth plague was three days of solid darkness. And the Bible says it was the kind of darkness that you could reach out and touch. It was an intense, enormous darkness. I don't know if you've ever been in a room that's really dark, where you had no light, and you couldn't find the door, you didn't know where was up, where was down, how to get out - or in a cave. That kind of intense darkness.

So, he backs off, Pharaoh backs off, and God removes the darkness. And then, he lets the people finally go. And he says, "No, I'm not going to allow them to do that." And the tenth plague comes, which is the death of the firstborn. And suddenly, that night throughout all Egypt, there were the screams of agonies and the cries of horror as mothers go to the beds of the firstborn children, and there are dead babies and dead children all over the land of Egypt. But over in Goshen land, the blood on the doorpost and on the lentils, symbolizing the protective care of the salvation to come through Jesus Christ set them scot-free. And nobody over there died.

Well, with the death of the firstborn, Pharaoh's power was finally broken. Totally broken. Totally humiliated. And this man who said, "I'm sovereign, who's this Jehovah God that I should listen to Him?" He found the power of this God. Israel, in turn, was given a clear demonstration that her God rules supreme as Psalm 110:2 says, "even in the midst of His enemies."

Now, if Pharaoh had simply agreed to go along, there wouldn't have been much of a demonstration. But God says, "I've set you up, Pharaoh, and I'm going to cause you to be in a position of authority so that when you resist me, I'm going to be able to demonstrate my power." And the end of verse 17 says that "I may show my power in thee and that my name." And there again, you have this word that represents all that God stands for, all of His character. The Greek word is simply the word for "name," the "ónoma," the essence of God." "That My name might be declared." The word is "diagello." It means, "to publish abroad that My name might be [passive] by these acts of the plague potentially declared throughout all the earth, the planet earth."

And indeed, that is exactly what happened, because the word very rapidly was spread throughout the ancient world of a God that is so powerful that He brought the Egyptian Pharaoh to his knees. So that, he forced the Egyptian Pharaoh to give up one of the most valuable commodities he had: a million and a half slaves.

Notice Exodus 15:14-16, Joshua 2:10-11, Joshua 9:9. And so, God chooses to make a point about His sovereign power to mankind through Pharaoh. This divine decision to use Pharaoh is not dependent, Paul says, upon any volitional act of Pharaoh or upon anything that he did. It is God sovereignly, in His pleasure, deciding. Pharaoh, no worse than other people, but chosen by God to demonstrate His good pleasure.

Verse 18 summarizes it this way, "Therefore [again, a conclusion] He has mercy [he exercises pity on those that He chooses to exercise pity on]." ".He has mercy on whom He desires. And, whom He wishes, he hardens ["skleruno," he hardens, which means, "to make stubborn"]. ".He hardens whom He will." The Bible tells us that God hardened Pharaoh's will. Exodus 4:21, 7:3, 9:12, 10:27, 14:4, 14:8, and then we also read that Pharaoh also hardened his own heart: Exodus 7:13-14 and verse 22; Exodus 8:15, Exodus 8:19, 8:32, Exodus 9:7, 34:35. Several times.

It is the terrible thing to fall into the hands of a righteous and indignant God, because He is totally sovereign. He calls all the plays. The wisdom of the believer is to recognize how wonderful our God is. Because He is what the Old Testament loved to call Him: El Elyon, "The Most High God."

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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